

SUBMISSION TO THE WORLD COUNCIL OF INDIGENOUS PEOPLES FROM
THE AUSTRALIAN ABORIGINAL PEOPLE ON OUR NATIONAL ISSUES

Australian Aboriginal people are the oldest surviving indigenous peoples in the world today. We have lived in this continent continuously since the beginning of human time, and have transmitted a culture that has never generated wars, poverty, inequality or human misery.

Our intention in hosting and participating in this Third General Assembly of the World Council of Indigenous Peoples is to win support, from other indigenous peoples and from those who heed the advice of the W.C.I.P., for our continuing struggle against genocide, dispossession and suppression.

Our lands were invaded by the British 193 years ago and our peoples were systematically slaughtered by the predatory British settlers and troops. A population of 300,000 peoples was reduced to 70,000 within 50 years. This slaughter was followed by legislative attempts in the States and Territories to ostensibly protect our peoples but which in fact led to the institutionalisation and segregation of the people by isolating them on reserved lands in the least hospitable parts of the country. Despite sickness, disease and brutality our people survived the colonialist regime, and in the 1930s, the white intruders finally conceded that our peoples would not become extinct. They attempted then to assimilate us into the white population, in a final attempt to destroy what remained of our distinctive culture and lifestyle.

Today our people are the most oppressed - we have the highest growth rate, the highest birth rate, the highest death rate, the worst health and housing and the lowest educational, occupational, economic, social and legal status of any identifiable section of the Australian population.

Despite our deplorable position and bleak future, we seek to take a role in the international arena: firstly we

see it as necessary that we develop Australia as a decent nation, one which will not engage in warlike and destructive actions, one which will not engage in nuclear proliferation, one which will not sympathise with the war-mongering nations, nor give asylum to the ousted white populations from Rhodesia and other countries which have practised genocide, apartheid and oppression of Third and Fourth World peoples.

Despite the stated opposition of the Australian Government to apartheid, we are concerned that Australia as a nation within the Western Alliance continues to give support to apartheid regimes and other inhuman governments, by accepting the white racist refuges, by continuing to allow Australia's national airline to fly to South Africa, and other instances of its incomplete commitment to elimination of racism.

We are concerned that the Australian Government is not taking proper measures to eliminate those factors which cause the continued genocide of our peoples. Violence against our peoples continues - Aboriginal people are still murdered and poisoned. But the highest casualties are caused by diseases which were eliminated in the white population forty years ago - leprosy, trachoma, and infective diseases which create physical and social cripples. The psychological and cultural genocide of our peoples continues through the ill-conceived policies of the Federal and State governments.

Aboriginal people have been substantially dispossessed by the process of colonization over the last 193 years. The Australian colony was subdivided into several districts, which in 1901, became federated under the Commonwealth of Australia.

The Commonwealth and the States retained their separate sovereignties until in 1967, a Commonwealth referendum was successful in deleting words from the Australian Constitution, Section 51 (xxvi), which exempted Aboriginal people from Commonwealth legislative power to make laws for any race for whom it was deemed necessary.

However, despite the Commonwealth Government's constitutional

power to intervene in State rights and its often stated intentions to protect Aboriginal rights, it has consistently failed to protect Aboriginal land rights and interests in relation to mining on or near Aboriginal land, particularly in the States.

Aboriginal people in each State and Territory have faced significantly different legislative and social instrumentalities and tactics, within the continent-wide context of dispossession and suppression.

2.50 The current proliferation of mining activities on Aboriginal land poses an immediate threat to Aboriginal survival. In every part of Australia the conflict between the indigenous people and the mining interests displays in the starkest relief the desperate struggle for survival and the inexorable mechanisms of dispossession.

2.51 Aboriginal people are demanding that we have our rights in land recognised as fully as possible, including full mineral rights and rights in renewable and non-renewable resources. We are also demanding a full right of veto over mining and exploration proposals on our lands, protected by Commonwealth legislation.

The National Aboriginal Conference, Aboriginal land councils and other organizations are currently engaging in new strategies, particularly in the international arena, to prevent the further loss of Aboriginal lands and destruction of Aboriginal societies at the hands of the racist State Governments, mining companies and other.

The National Aboriginal Conference is particularly concerned with the nuclear arms build-up in the South Pacific and the development of American marine and air force bases on Australian soil.

The National Aboriginal Conference is concerned that there should be debate on this whole issue as most American bases are within close proximity to Aboriginal land and communities. We have not yet assessed in full the ramifications of these bases, particularly in relation to the development of Aboriginal communities.

We fear that the presence of American bases will pre-empt future decisions relation to land rights and economic development of the Aboriginal people.

It is common knowledge that the Americans are not obligated inform the Austrlaian Parliament, or the people, of the type of weaponry development of nuclear arms. We have great fear for our people, particularly for the implications of the Presidential Decison No. 59 which was signed by President Carter nine months ago and we concur with the concern expressed by Mr. Hayden in his speech to the National Press Club on Tuesday, 14 April 1981 - "that this decision, and associated planning documents, encompasses a most elaborate framework of strategic options ranging from very limited nuclear strikes through counterforce strikes to full-scale war". If the Americans do not discount the possiblility of full-scale war, then we feel that we should be consulted on all matters relating to any form of arms build-up on Austrlaian soil".

One other aspect that concerns the National Aboriginal Conference is the possibility of these joint strategic plans influencing the Federal Government's policy on Aboriginal Land Rights. The National Aboriginal Conference is also concerned about the Indo-China crises. Since 1975 there has been a slow progression of refugees coming to Austrlaia. There are two major components of the refugee population: one is the "boat people" from Vietnam; and the other, the land people from Laos and especially from Kampuchea. The Austalian government has revised its policy towards the development of a more concerted and effective refugee resettlement programme within Australia.

The recent exodus of Vietnamese peoples of different racial and economic origins and Kampuchean peoples is due to the upheaval of war and changes in government in the Indo-Chinese area. Refugees continue to flow from these countries as a result of the aftermath of these events, and are taking up residence in Australia.

In 1978 the U.S. Assisnat Secretary of State estimated that 125 thousand people had left Laos for Thailand since 1975.

Fifteen thousand left Kampuchea and thirty thousand people had left Vietnam by sea in the previous two years at which point in time there were over 100 thousand refugees in Thailand who were made up of Laotians and Kampuchians.

The concern of the Aboriginal people at present is not so much an objection to the influx of refugees but it is that of concern with the failure of the Australian Government and other countries in the Western world to take positive action to give the indigenous people the right to exercise their inalienable right to freedom of determining their future and continued existence in their own countries.

We take the view that resettling refugees in countries such as Australia will add to the increase of racial tension.

We make this point merely to identify the fact that Australia since British settlement has forced Aboriginals to be migrants within their own lands.

The primary concern of the Aboriginal people is the amount of influence that the refugee crisis may have on the Australian government in coming to terms with the Aboriginal call for land rights.

The National Aboriginal Conference is concerned that when looking at the refugee crises, the Australian government fails to correct a major crisis within its own boundaries in relation to Aboriginal people.

The National Aboriginal Conference urges that the World Conference of Indigenous Peoples' 3rd General Assembly make a concerted effort to have nations sympathetic to the rights of indigenous peoples exert economic and political embargoes upon those countries that deny the freedom and rights of the indigenous people.

The report of the Commissioner for Community Relations since 1976, clearly demonstrates the extent of racial discrimination throughout Australia particularly, in relation to the Aboriginal people. The report showed the

" One-Third of the total number of the discrimination

complaints brought to the notice of the Commissioner under the Racial Discrimination Act 1975, have been made by Aborigines, an extremely high proportion when one considers that there are over 100 immigrant ethnic groups in Australia."

The complaints that were made involved

". . . police harassment, discrimination in employment, discrimination in tenancy and property matters, discrimination in hotels and similar establishments, derogatory racial references in publications, and discriminatory treatment in gaols."

In respect of these complaints we recognise the failure of government authorities to enact protective legislation in respect to our human rights, and it is the failure of the Government to recognise the basic rights of the people that concerns the National Aboriginal Conference.

One particular area that requires a great deal of attention is the integration of traditional law and western law.

The success and continuation of our society is deeply rooted in the laws that were established in the Dreamtime - that man and his environment were one. The responsibility of the Tribal Elders were to see that the sacred teachings and laws were adhered to and to advise in cases of conflict, not adjudicate. We believe that the government has determined what values should prevail over our communities. Thus the conflict between the Aboriginal people and white Australia.

Aboriginal women must be recognized as having a role in the maintenance of customary law, in the socialization of children into the value system, in dispute settlement procedures, and in the performance of religious rituals, which maintain harmony and resolve conflict, and customary rights in land must be recognized.

These assertions of the position of Aboriginal women in

Australia are directed at the white male regime in Australia, and not at Aboriginal men, who are the other side of the coin - oppression of Aboriginal people by whites is directed at both sexes.

Aboriginal people have never conceded defeat, nor have we signed treaties. We remain a nation - we have never accepted British citizenship nor given the British the right to rule in our country, and over our affairs.

We call on the Australian Government to begin negotiations with Aboriginal people, the rightful owners of this country, to rectify the theft of our land, the extermination of our people, and the continuing racist oppression. The Australian Government must recognize that sovereignty has always resided with the Aboriginal people. Our entitlement to this land is the result of our occupancy from time immemorial.

We call upon the World Council of Indigenous Peoples and its member organizations to defend our rights to this land and our demand for justice in all international forums.

We, the Aboriginal people of Australia, likewise commit our support to the indigenous peoples of the world.